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ABSTRACT

A study looked at voluntary midlife career changers to discover who they are, why they change careers, and what barriers they face. It also explored the roles education and counseling play in helping midlife career changers achieve their goals. The methodology employed was a literature review. Four types of midlife career changers were identified based on the amount of external pressure and extent of personal desire to change careers. The types differed significantly on a number of variables. Personnel administrators were found to have negative attitudes about career changers. Recent research-based evidence did not validate in any large measure these opinions. Determinants for voluntary career changes were dissatisfaction, attraction, obstacles, personal factors, and social changes. Continuing education--both planned educational programs conducted by institutions and self-planned and self-managed learning activities--was identified as likely to be used by midlife career changers. To help career changers, vocational counselors were recommended to focus on a more holistic view of career development, aid in grief management, and help alleviate special problems facing returning women. Conclusions were that attempts be made to change attitudes of personnel managers and to educate vocational counselors regarding midlife career changers. (YLB)

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VOLUNTARY MIDLIFE CAREER CHANGERS: WHO ARE THEY? WHY DO THEY CHANGE CAREERS? AND WHAT ARE THE ROLES EDUCATION AND COUNSELING CAN PLAY?

by

Avraham Lachs, M. P. A.

March 1985

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

No doubt you have heard of Joe Smith, the teacher who resigned his professional job at age 36 to become the school janitor. However, have you ever heard of Clark Jones, the 39-year-old production manager who resigned to raise orchids for a living, or Phyllis Johnson, the 42-year-old lawyer who left her practice to make ceramics? Like Joe, Clark and Phyllis are two out of thousands of adults who each year leave established, well-paying professional and managerial careers to try something entirely different, often at a substantial (though frequently temporary) cut in earnings.

Just who are these voluntary midlife career changers? Why do they purposely uproot themselves from excellent careers to explore new and, sometimes, unfamiliar territories? Some would have you believe that these career changers are really people with psychological problems, and their desire to change careers is simply a means for them to try to escape from their past failures. Research, however, says that this belief is incorrect. While some voluntary career changers do have minor emotional problems, for the most part they are well-adjusted

intelligent persons who were pushed into the wrong careers to begin with or else experienced changes in their personal values as they progressed through their lives. Thus, their initial careers either never brought them satisfaction, or else they no longer satisfy them.

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, it looked closely at midlife career changers with an eye to discovering who these people really are, why they change careers, and what barriers they face. Secondly, it attempted to answer the question: What roles can education and counseling play in helping midlife career changers achieve their goals? The method employed in the study was a literature review, and all references were obtained from the Arizona State University Library.

CHAPTER TWO

Who Are The Midlife Career Changers?

Midlife Defined

Before examining the characteristics of the changers, it is necessary to define terms. For purposes of this study, midlife was defined as 34 to 55 years of age. The lower limit was set because by 34 most persons have completed their education and established careers. The upper boundary distinguishes midcareer changers from early retirees who may also be seeking new positions but who are not primarily concerned with a new and central vocation.

One of the best summaries of midlife was given by Mayer (16, pp. 21-22):

> Arriving at the brink of middle age is like being stranded in a foreign country. With few guideposts to direct him, a man feels disoriented by the unfamiliar terrain and the multiple changes jarring his psyche. Suddenly the past seems a humiliating reminder of risks untaken, women unconquered, and chances ignored. And the future seems to be hurtling toward a dreaded rendezvous with old age and death. Meanwhile, responsibilities are mounting and physical energies are ebbing. Children are rebelling or departing, wives becoming assertive and demanding, and parents falling ill or dying. Younger men are scrambling up the work ladder and job options are shrinking.

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Career Change Defined

Career change is an actual change of occupation rather than an upgrading of position within the same line of work. Moving from salesman to sales manager or from teacher to principal, for example, is not a career change; whereas a change from salesman to teacher would be.

Characteristics of Midlife Career Changers

In a study published in 1980, L. Eugene Thomas (29) interviewed 73 men who had changed out of established careers. These men were between 34 and 54 years of age; a majority came from middle- or upper-middle-class family backgrounds; all had some college training, and the majority had completed bachelor's degrees. Prior to changing careers, they had been employed in a wide range of managerial, professional, or technical careers. The purpose of the study was to develop a typology of midlife career changers in these high-level occupations.

Thomas' typology was based on two factors: 1) the amount of external pressure placed on the respondents to leave their former jobs and 2) the extent to which they personally desired to make a career change. Individuals who experienced low external pressure to leave their former careers and who were not really highly motivated to leave them were designated "Drift-outs." Those who were under equally low external pressure to leave but were highly motivated to change were called "Opt-outs." Men who were unmotivated to change careers but were under external pressure to change

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were called "Force-outs," and those who were under high external and internal pressure to change were labled "Bow-outs."

Education of the Changers

When these types were compared, they were found to differ significantly (chi-square at .05 alpha) on a number of variables. Force-outs had the least amount of education in preparation for their first career, while Bow-outs had the highest amount of prior education. The Force-outs also were least likely to utilize formal education in pursuing their career change, whereas 80 percent of the Opt-outs used formal education for their change.

Force-outs, interestingly, made the most radical career changes, while Bow-outs made the least. The Bow-outs, in fact, seemed to be more-or-less conventional businessmen who tried to maximize their advancement by changing careers when doors appeared closed in one area. The Bow-out members were also the least satisfied with their new careers. The Opt-out group was most motivated to create a new harmony between their personal values and their work. "Drift-outs were least distinguishable of all..." (29, p. 179). A summary of Thomas' findings is provided in Table 1 on page 6.

Table 1

Characteristics of Various Types of Career Changers*

"Drift-outs"	"Opt-outs"	"Force-outs"	"Bow-outs"
		Most radical change in career	Least radical change in career
	Most satisfied with career change		Least satisfied with career change
		Least previous education	Most previous education
	Most additional education	Least additional education	
Took longest time to make the change		Took least time to make the change	
		Least influenced by achievement	Most influenced by achievement
	Most influenced by values	Least influenced by values	

* All indicated differences are significant at the .05 level, or beyond (using the X^2 statistic)

Source: L. E. Thomas, "Typology of Midlife Career Changers," Journal of Vocational Behavior, April 1980.

Before examining in detail the factors that induce people to change careers, Chapter Three will look at both the attitudes of personnel administrators toward the changers and at research evidence that tends to refute some of the administrators' beliefs.

CHAPTER THREE

Perceptions of Career Changers

Attitudes of Personnel Administrators

Unless a career changer becomes self-employed or goes to work for a small organization, sooner or later he or she must come in contact with a personnel administrator or other person in charge of screening job applicants. Although personnel employees rarely make a final hiring decision, in most large firms they conduct the initial interview; and unless an applicant can get past this interview, he or she has little probability of being hired. Thus, the attitudes of personnel administrators toward an applicant can be critical.

To determine the attitudes of personnel administrators toward midlife career changers, Brodey (2) interviewed 25 personnel administrators in Metropolitan Philadelphia. All the participants had at least five years' experience in personnel work; and while it could be argued that the reactions from such a small sample are not scientifically generalizable, the fact that there was great homogeneity of

response indicated that the responses should not be taken lightly.

In a personal interview with each administrator, the researcher asked the questions in Table 2. Question number four was asked to gauge the differences in reactions to: 1) the housewife who had never worked in a career position (Mrs. V.), 2) a man or woman who wished to change to an entirely new career (Mr. U.), and 3) a man or woman who wished to upgrade his or her career (Mrs. Y.).

For the most part, the reactions were far more positive toward Mrs. V. and Mrs. Y. than toward Mr. U. Many of the respondents, in fact, reacted to Mr. U. as a midlife failure. Though the responses to Mrs. V. were relatively positive, most participants would only be willing to consider her for low-paying, entry-level positions and then only if she would update her skills through education. Reed (18, p. 40), in fact, stated that many educated homemakers turned to teaching careers as a result of being unable to find adequately-paying jobs in business.

It was assumed, though wrongly, perhaps, that Mr. U. would not fit into an entry-level position or one with a lower salary than he was accustomed to earning. A number of respondents suggested that Mr. U. look at his motivations and "...make sure he's not changing out of a generalized frustration that will still be present in another [career]" (2, p. 34). Only three administrators suggested additional education, and one indicated that perhaps changes

Table 2

The Interview Questionnaire

1. How would you rate your awareness of the topic of mid-life career redirection? 1—no interest; 2—slight interest; 3—some interest; 4—a good deal; or 5—intense; explain.
   a. Have you read articles on the subject? Specify as far as possible.
   b. Have you been present at meetings or seminars at which it has been discussed? Specify as far as possible.
2. What advantages do you see to the hiring of a mid-life career redirector?
   a. Can you cite any specific instances?
   b. What traits caused you to hire such a person?
   c. Would you look for different traits in hiring a potential career redirector than in a young person?
   d. Are there any particular kinds of positions for which they would be good candidates?
3. What drawbacks do you see?
   a. Can you cite particular instances?
   b. How can they be overcome?
4. What advice would you give each of the following?
   a. Mrs. V. is a 40-year-old woman who has not worked since her graduation from college 20 years ago with a B.S. in English. However, she has been very active in community organizations. She wants to embark on a full-time professional career.
   b. Mr. U. is a 40-year-old man employed as a salesman making $25,000 a year. He wishes to start a new career. He graduated from college 20 years ago with a B.S. in English.
   c. Mrs. Y. is a 40-year-old woman who has worked as a secretary for 15 years. She wishes to return to school to prepare herself for an administrative position.
   d. The program director of the "Adult Center" of a university needs advice on the types of counseling services and educational programs that should be developed for those men and women who come to her center with an interest in career redirection.
5. Confidential data
   a. Age: under 35, 35 to 55, or over 55.
   b. Number of years in personnel administration.
   c. Previous occupations.
   d. Employer: profit or not for profit.

Source: J. L. Brodey, "Mid-Life Career Redirection," Journal of College Placement, Summer 1981.

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in his present job would make it acceptable and that he did not need another career. There was a general distrust of his motivation; and where this attitude was not present, it was nonetheless felt that a career change was highly impractical. "No one was optimistic or encouraging about his chances for success unless he went into business for himself" (2, p. 35). In general, Mr. U.'s desire for a career change was viewed as a symptom of a psychological problem.

With respect to Mrs. Y., the person wishing to upgrade her skills, most of the responses were positive. Almost all agreed that her change was feasible; no one questioned her motivations, and only one felt that her desired change might be inappropriate. Only about half of the administrators felt she should change companies, however. Even in Mrs. Y.'s case there seemed to be a strong feeling that if one can't make it with one organization, he or she cannot make it anywhere--a sad and very frequently incorrect attitude.

Research Findings

The question now needs to be asked: Do personnel administrators' negative attitudes about career changers stand up to research findings? The answer is "slightly."

Several researchers in the early and late 1950s (6, 24) did observe emotional problems in career changers. In his dissertation in 1972, however, Clopton (3) found that career changers did not show significant deviations from national norms on the California Personality Inventory, which he took as an indicator of emotional adjustment. Vaitenas

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and Wiener (30) in 1977 did find that their experimental group of business-managerial career changers was significantly lower in emotional stability than their control group of nonchangers. However, changers in the 35-49 age group were higher (though not significantly so) in emotional stability than changers under 35 as measured by the Emotional Stability Scale of the Gordon Personal Profile. The study did not conclude that the changers had real psychological problems, though. It only found that changers were less stable emotionally than nonchangers. By far the most significant difference between changers and nonchangers in the Vaitenas and Wiener study was a lack of congruity between the present occupational environment and occupational interests.

Hence, recent research-based evidence does not validate in any large measure the opinions of those personnel administrators who view career changers as psychologically less desirable than nonchangers. As Chapter Four, in fact, will point out, many changers are highly rational, ambitious, and successful in their new careers.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Why People Change Careers

While many personnel administrators believe that midlife career changers have psychological problems, and while there is some research evidence that changers may be less emotionally stable than nonchangers, a fairly large body of research indicates that voluntary career changers are well-adjusted, rational adults who move from unsatisfactory occupational situations (8, 4, 19, 17). Furthermore, almost all the changers report increased work and life satisfaction following their changes. The factors inducing voluntary career changes will now be examined.

E. L. Tolbert, as summarized in Sagal and DeBlassie (21, p. 37), suggested four factors influencing career dissatisfaction:

1. Supervision and relations with supervisors
2. Salary, wages, and fringe benefits
3. Occupational aptitudes and general ability
4. Occupational interests and tenure

Coupling any one of these factors, if it is unsatisfactory, with declining health, an unhappy marriage, or fear of being

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passed over by younger workers could result in a decision to make a radical career change in midlife.

In an earlier study, Lee (14, p. 50) proposed four broad categories of factors influencing major career changes:

1. Factors associated with the area of origin (first career)
2. Factors associated with the area of destination (second career)
3. Intervening obstacles
4. Personal factors

Lee's basic premise was that every occupation has numerous factors which hold, attract, or repel a person; and a person does not change occupations in midcareer unless he or she perceives both dissatisfaction in one career and an attraction to another career. Furthermore, the amount of dissatisfaction and attraction necessary to cause a person to actually make a change depends upon the obstacles to change and personal factors making the person more-or-less resistant to change.

Dissatisfaction

Neapolitan (17) interviewed 25 subjects who made major midlife career changes and 25 nonchangers in the same occupations. Neapolitan's research indicated that the major source of dissatisfaction that led to career changes was a "lack of congruence between the person's work orientations and the rewards of the occupations" (17, p. 217). A year earlier, Thomas (28) had reached an identical conclusion. Work orientation can be defined as the worker's wants and expectations relative to his or her employment (20, p. 304) and generally

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refers to the intrinsic properties of the work such as the nature of the job task, the meaningfulness of the work, and personal growth through performance (22, p. 209).

On the basis of clinical observations, Carl G. Jung (13) noted that humans undergo a transition at about age 35 or 40; and at this time, "Men's values...tend to undergo a reversal into the opposite" (13, p. 107). In other words, those who most successfully cope with aging are those who replace such values as control, competitiveness, acquisition, and aggressiveness with more gentle (or "opposite") values such as cooperation, thoughtfulness, and concern for others.

Jung's research seems to have been substantiated by research in the 1970s. Thomas et al. (25) interviewed 75 men who had left managerial and professional jobs to go into completely different careers. The researchers observed that the nature of the men's career changes seemed to be not merely a change in jobs but rather a subtle change in value emphasis from dominant cultural values like success and prestige to more self-determined values, such as being with family, community service, or more time for leisure in a pleasant setting. The middle years seem, therefore, to be a time of continuing development along with a shift in personality and values. Even where a change in careers has not occurred, many middle-aged persons rethink goals and purposes to which they dedicated their lives at the start of their careers (26, p. 326). Thus, factors such as relations with supervisors and pay are likely to lead to

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changes in employers but not likely (in contrast to Tolbert's findings) to lead to career changes.

Attraction

As previously stated, dissatisfaction with one's present career was generally not sufficient for a change unless a second career appeared more attractive. Indeed, all 25 changers in Neapolitan's survey (17, p. 219) perceived that their second occupations were congruent with their work orientations and would provide the satisfaction lacking in their first occupations.

Obstacles

Even when dissatisfaction and attraction are present, obstacles deter some people from voluntarily changing careers, and the major obstacles are financial in nature. In Neapolitan's survey (17, p. 221), several nonchangers who had both dissatisfaction and attraction had no one to financially support their change and the resultant short-term or long-term income loss. Thus, they felt there was no feasible way to make the desired change, particularly when they were the sole or primary source of support for a family. Nonfinancial factors "...were not perceived by either changers or nonchangers as important obstacles" (17, p. 222).

Personal Factors

The fourth determinant for voluntary career change is essentially the way in which the person views the obstacles. Persons who changed despite income loss and hardships

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believed that they were masters of their own fates and that any hardships would be short lived. In Thomas' study (28, pp. 205-206), for example, 74 percent of his sample had dependent children at home at the time of their career change; and in 60 percent of the cases the wife was not working. Non-changers, on the other hand, believed that forces beyond their control would cause their attempts to end in failure.

Social Changes

Though Lee did not examine social changes, it should be noted that changes in society at large as well as personal factors have facilitated career changes. Increased tolerance for career changing, increased affluence, the rapidly changing world of work, and more abundant educational opportunities make it possible for people to act on their new-found values and goals, whereas in an earlier generation they may have had to tough it out. Chapter Five looks at the subject of education and career changes.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Education And Career Changes

When a person makes a major change in his or her life, generally the individual requires some kind of additional knowledge or skills to make that change successful. In the case of a career changer, the additional knowledge or skills required could be minor as in the case of the teacher turned janitor. On the other hand, a salesman who desires to become a teacher will have to acquire a bachelor's degree in education.

This chapter examines the role of education and careers. It begins with a brief look at the job market through 1995 and ends with a look at continuing education--that division of education that is most likely to be utilized by the mid-life career changer.

The Job Market Through 1995

> The United States is preparing to enter a new age, an unprecedented period in which high technology products and processes will play an increasingly significant role in the life of the individual... (15, p. 32).

This prediction, however, does not mean that all workers'

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skills will have to be radically changed to find and retain jobs within the next 10 years. Most new jobs even in so-called high-tech industries "...will require high school diplomas rather than advanced education and training" (15, p. 53). The reason for this fact is that all industries require and will continue to require large numbers of assemblers, clerks, warehouse workers, secretaries, and so on. Furthermore, while the percentage growth will be very high over the next decade in skilled occupations such as computer programming and computer-systems analysis, so few persons, comparatively, are now employed in those fields that the actual number of new jobs created in those fields will be tiny compared to other areas. See Table 3 on the following page. Indeed, only about six percent of the new jobs will be in skilled, high-technology fields.

Continuing Education for Career Changers

While the greatest number of new jobs may not require credentials beyond high school, by and large the best-paying jobs do; and when the career changer does not go into business for himself or herself, the person may need credentials showing some ability in the new field. "...formal education has become a process through which one passes to be certified 'fit' for employment" (23, p. 351).

Most often, however, an adult cannot take time off from his or her career to return to full-time schooling to learn new knowledge or skills. Thus, some form of part-time continuing education becomes the vehicle by which

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Table 3—Forty occupations with largest job growth, 1982-95

Occupation	Change in total employment (in thousands)	Percentage of total job growth	Percent change
Building custodians	779	3.0	27.5
Cashiers	744	2.9	47.4
Secretaries	719	2.8	29.5
General clerks, office	696	2.7	29.6
Sales clerks	685	2.7	23.5
Nurses, registered	642	2.5	48.9
Waiters and waitresses	562	2.2	33.8
Teachers, kindergarten and elementary	511	2.0	37.4
Truck drivers	425	1.7	26.5
Nursing aides and orderlies	423	1.7	34.8
Sales representatives, technical	386	1.5	29.3
Accountants and auditors	344	1.3	40.2
Automotive mechanics	324	1.3	38.3
Supervisors of blue-collar workers	319	1.2	26.6
Kitchen helpers	305	1.2	35.9
Guards and doorkeepers	300	1.2	47.3
Food preparation and service workers, fast food restaurants	297	1.2	36.7
Managers, store	292	1.1	30.1
Carpenters	247	1.0	28.6
Electrical and electronic technicians	222	.9	60.7
Licensed practical nurses	220	.9	37.1
Computer systems analysts	217	.8	85.3
Electrical engineers	209	.8	65.3
Computer programmers	205	.8	76.9
Maintenance repairers, general utility	193	.8	27.8
Helpers, trades	190	.7	31.2
Receptionists	189	.7	48.8
Electricians	173	.7	31.8
Physicians	163	.7	34.0
Clerical supervisors	162	.6	34.6
Computer operators	160	.6	75.8
Sales representatives, nontechnical	160	.6	27.4
Lawyers	159	.6	34.3
Stock clerks, stockroom and warehouse	156	.6	18.8
Typists	155	.6	15.7
Delivery and route workers	153	.6	19.2
Bookkeepers, hand	152	.6	15.9
Cooks, restaurants	149	.6	42.3
Bank tellers	142	.6	30.0
Cooks, short order, specialty and fast food	141	.6	32.2

Note: Includes only detailed occupations with 1982 employment of 25,000 or more.
Data for 1995 are based on moderate-trend projections.
Source—Silvestri, George T., John M. Lukasiewicz, and Marcus E. Einstein. "Occupational Employment Projections through 1995." *Monthly Labor Review*, (November 1983), pp. 37-49.

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the adult acquires the requisite knowledge or skills.

Houle (3, p. 229) defined adult continuing education as

> the process by which men and women (alone, in groups, or in institutional settings) seek to improve themselves or their society by increasing their skill, their knowledge, or their sensitiveness [and] any process by which individuals, groups, or institutions try to help men and women improve in these ways.

In other words, continuing education can be planned educational programs conducted by institutions and learning activities which are self-planned and self-managed.

For the career changer desiring certification, abundant organizations offer adult learning programs which can be taken during nonwork time. Some universities, for example, offer on-campus and off-campus graduate and undergraduate degrees which can be completed at night and on weekends. Opportunities for certification besides the colleges include programs implemented by employers for their employees, governmental agencies, professional societies, and proprietary schools--independent, job-oriented, intensive, student-centered trade and technical schools which operate on a profit-making basis.

> These schools [proprietary schools] are best at providing training for new or highly specialized occupations until a critical mass of necessary trainees justifies the attention of more sizeable vocational systems. It is the increase in this sector of vocational training that may have the most radical impact on traditional public school education...(5, p. 18).

Furthermore, many of these schools are approved for veterans' benefits and offer financial assistance for some students. See page 21 for sample advertisements. If the career changer

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THIS NUMBER IS FOR PEOPLE WHO SEE ALL THE MEDICAL JOBS IN THE CLASSIFIEDS BUT DON'T HAVE THE TRAINING.

861-9200 Ext 20

Ask about financial aid
BRYMAN DIVISION
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Phoenix, Az
National Education Center

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DAY or EVENING CLASSES

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* Communications Specialist
* Data Entry Specialist
* Medical Transcription
* Secretarial
GED

Arizona Career College

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MESA
1620 W. University Mesa, Az 85201 (602) 834-3931

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DIESEL TECHNOLOGY
AUTOMOTIVE TECHNOLOGY

CLASSES START MAR. 18

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• Placement Assistance • Approved for
• Student Loans & Grants Veterans
• Over 100,000 sq.ft. of Classroom & Shop

UNIVERSAL TECHNICAL INSTITUTE
TRAINING FOR CAREERS IN INDUSTRY SINCE 1965
3121 W. Weldon Ave., Phoenix, AZ 85017
264-4164

HIGH-TECH INSTITUTE
You can't fight the TECHNOLOGICAL REVOLUTION...
SO JOIN IT!
TRAINING IN COMPUTER ELECTRONICS
Classes start March 25 & April 1
954-9400
4021 N. 30th St. PHOENIX
¼ Blk South of Indian School

Source: The Arizona Republic, March 10, 1985.

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requires knowledge or skills but not certification, then self-directed learning projects may be the most effective and efficient means of achieving these skills.

Besides further education, career changers often need advice and counseling on how to go about obtaining a new career. Although there is no shortage of vocational counselors, many, if not most, are ill equipped to deal with the special needs of midlife career changers. Chapter Six examines this problem.

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CHAPTER SIX

Vocational Counselors And The Midlife Career Changer

If a person resigns his or her position to accept a position already offered, or if the person is going to become self-employed, he or she is already well on the road to a new career. Frequently, however, the changer runs into serious obstacles to the change such as financial problems and the attitudes of personnel administrators. At other times, the individual may be very aware that his or her present career is unsatisfactory but may need guidance toward a new career. When problems such as these arise, many persons will seek vocational counseling. This chapter will look at the special problems in counseling midlife career changers in general plus additional problems that face those persons compelled (or who feel compelled) to leave their jobs as well as an additional problem that seems to arise for women leaving homemaking careers for paying jobs.

Career Changers Versus Career Starters

Traditionally, vocational professionals have stressed

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rational planning and the aggressive pursuit of goals as the best way to help middle-aged persons make career changes (27, p. 17). That is to say, they have stressed essentially the same techniques in counseling middle-aged persons as they stress when counseling young adults seeking first jobs. Bolles (1, p. 76) stated:

> Learn to think of yourself as an active agent [italics in original] who helps to mold his present environment and his future; rather than as a passive agent, who waits for his environment to mold him.

This advice is for middle-aged persons seeking entirely new careers as well as for young graduates seeking their first jobs.

If, however, the dominant values of the midlife person are different than those of the very young, "...the traditional vocational counselor may be the last person who can help [with a midlife career change]" (27, p. 22). Thomas made this statement because the traditional vocational counselor has been trained to focus almost exclusively on the vocational sphere rather than attempting to look at the person's total life. While Thomas made no recommendations as to how to improve vocational counseling for the middle aged, the implication is clearly that a more holistic view of career development is necessary. In fact:

> The career counselor who assumes that the voluntary midlife changer is primarily in need of career information so that he can "trade in" his present reality for a shiny new model may be doing very little to enhance the client's future self-concept through greater work satisfaction in the new position (10, p. 329).

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Jung (13, p. 108) suggested colleges for forty year olds. These colleges would be designed to prepare their students for their coming life much as ordinary colleges prepare young people for early adulthood. While Jung's suggestion might be impractical due to expense, it should not be an overwhelming task to train new vocational professionals how to take into consideration the potentially different needs and wants of adults over 35 compared to younger adults.

Grief and the Career Changer

A special case requiring special training for employment counselors involves the adult who is experiencing grief as a result of losing his or her job. Generally one thinks of "job loss" as an involuntary happening. Sometimes, however, a person may be so upset by the lack of congruence between his or her present career and his or her new values that the person feels compelled to change careers even though the change was ostensibly voluntary. Hence, even some voluntary changers can face grief.

Grief is defined as extreme sadness or deep sorrow, and persons are

> ...quite capable of grieving over the loss of anything important.... What by its presence represented stability, gratification, and security can by its loss destroy these same senses" (12, pp. 196-197).

Grief over the loss of a career can be more severe than over the loss of an elderly parent (12, p. 197), and it is vital that employment counselors understand this fact and recognize such grief when it is present.

> Although there is no prescribed way to grieve, if there is a sense of loss, grief in some form will be experienced and grief-related behavior will be evident to the discerning counselor. Should the loss of career be particularly critical to the individual and should no new career opportunities be readily recognizable, the grief may well lead to substantial disorientation, lowered self-esteem, less concern for self, and a resulting negating behavior (12, p. 198).

Thus, when deep-seated grief is present, counselors must help the individuals deal with their grief before moving on to future planning. Until grief feelings are worked through, the person may not be able to work cognitively.

How, then, can counselors help? According to Jackson (11, p. 5), effective grief management involves three steps: 1) facing the reality of the situation, 2) breaking the ties with the object of loss, and 3) developing ways to find new interests, satisfactions, and creative activities. Since the third step cannot be accomplished effectively before the grief is resolved, the counselor must allow the person to experience the grief as a normal reaction to his or her loss and must encourage him or her to make contact with the full extent of the feelings and thoughts resulting from the loss. Then the individual will better be able to accept his or her career loss, can break the bonds with the previous career, and then begin a serious exploration of new career possibilities.

Special Problems Facing Returning Women

After 20 years of cooking, cleaning, and children, a woman may return to the work force and find herself working

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for a woman much younger than she. For the older woman, according to 45-year-old Joanna Henderson, "...it's a double whammy. The stigma is more intense if your boss is both younger and a woman" (7). The older women have accepted the position of working for younger men in a largely male domain, but they often strongly resent working for younger women who received business-school educations, specialized training, and fewer barriers to corporate management. At the same time, the younger women managers often harbor resentments toward their older subordinates. The older women "...sort of want to...wipe their noses" (7), and such an attitude infuriates the young women managers.

To help alleviate the problem, Henderson helped organize a seminar on the subject at Boston's Simmons College. She does not profess to know any quick solutions, but in this author's opinion, certain teaching techniques such as role playing and case studies, as well as panel discussions with older women, younger women, and vocational counselors could go a long way toward alleviating stress and fostering understanding.

The situation facing career changers is varied and complex. Some persons may flow from one career to another with few dislocations. For others, however, the switch can be accomplished only after a great deal of preparation and, in some cases, a certain amount of grief. Chapter Seven provides some conclusions.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Summary, Findings, Conclusions, And Recommendations

Summary And Findings

The preceding study was prepared to provide the reader with an insight into the subject of voluntary midlife career changers. It defined midlife as the period from age 34 to 55 and career change as a major shift from one occupational field to another. The profiles of various types of career changers were examined along with the barriers they face--primarily financial problems and negative attitudes of personnel managers.

The relationships of education and vocational counseling to career changing were also looked at. Findings in this area were:

1. Almost any career change requires the changer to acquire new knowledge or skills or both.

2. Most jobs, even in high-tech industries, require no more than a high school diploma plus some job training.

3. The best-paying jobs generally require formal educational credentials beyond high school.

4. Since most adults cannot afford lengthy absences from work to return to school, most will resort to

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some form of part-time continuing education to acquire necessary credentials; and numerous public and private institutions provide this service.

5. If the career changer requires new knowledge or skills but not credentials, self-directed learning projects may be the most effective and efficient means of acquiring such knowledge or skills.

6. Many, if not most, vocational counselors are ill prepared to deal with the midlife career changer's unique problems.

7. Some persons, such as women leaving a homemaking career or persons who feel strong compulsions to leave previous careers, have social problems which may require education and counseling over and beyond that required by other changers.

Conclusions

Since only one survey of personnel administrators' attitudes was reported herein, it cannot be concluded that all personnel administrators look with disfavor on midlife career changers. The fact that 100 percent of the personnel administrators surveyed held pessimistic views toward the changers, however, indicated that at least a large number of personnel managers may hold such views. The author's own experience in this area corroborates this conclusion.

If the survey findings are indeed true of the vast majority of personnel managers, the task of changing the opinions of any significant numbers of them may be insurmountable. It is nonetheless recommended that the more optimistic facts regarding voluntary career changers be submitted for publication in professional journals that are widely read by personnel managers. An example of such a journal is The Personnel Administrator. In the author's

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literature review, no such articles were discovered in popular personnel journals.

With respect to education, it can reasonably be concluded that formal and informal education play major roles for career changers. Since social factors today are more conducive to career changes than they were in the past, it is likely that an increasing demand will be placed on educational institutions in the future by career changers. Proprietary business and technical schools may lead the way.

A centralized source of information that would be capable of informing persons of the large numbers of federal, state, local, and privately-sponsored educational programs available to adults is a recommendation to be explored. Sources of financing should also be available at such a clearinghouse. Details regarding the design and implementation of such a system are outside the stated purposes of this report, but the challenge and possibility of this type of system are noteworthy.

Finally, the problem of <u>re</u>educating vocational counselors regarding midlife career changers may be as overwhelming as that of <u>re</u>educating personnel administrators. The inviting of counselors to seminars like the ones at Simmon's College (page 27) is one recommendation and attempts to publish facts in their professional publications is another.

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ADDENDUM

The second part of this report's statement of purpose asks the question: What roles can education and counseling play in helping midlife career changers achieve their goals? The portion of the question referring to education refers to the education of the career changers only, not to the ecucation of counselors, personnel workers, or others with whom the career changer may come in contact.

As an addendum to the report, however, the author would like to recommend that at least one lesson on midlife career changers be included in all college courses in personnel management and vocational counseling. The task of contacting and retraining practicing personnel managers and vocational counselors would be prodigious to say the least. Indeed, the job of contacting them alone would be tremendous in terms of time and money. Including a special lesson in standard college courses with this report as a guide would be relatively simple, however, and by broaching the subject in standard courses, the student would be exposed to the facts before becoming prejudiced on the job.

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